



^b
UNIVERSITÄT
BERN

NORTHERN UGANDA: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

**STATEMENT BY ROBERTA COHEN
NON-RESIDENT SENIOR FELLOW AND SENIOR ADVISER,
BROOKINGS-BERN PROJECT ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT**

**PANEL ON THE HUMAN CHALLENGE IN NORTHERN UGANDA
SPONSORED BY AVSI-USA AND THE INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY**

30 APRIL 2007

First, let me commend AVSI -- the Association of Volunteers in International Service -- and the International Rescue Committee for their work in Uganda long before international attention focused on the crisis and also for organizing today's program on the humanitarian challenges in northern Uganda. The new book, *Kop Ango? A Day in the Life of Northern Uganda* by Roberto Fontolan captures the devastating experience of people forcibly uprooted within their own countries by internal conflict and huddled into more than two hundred overcrowded internally displaced persons camps.

The overall destitution, insecurity, poor medical conditions, lack of livelihoods, and dependency in the IDP camps are not, however, unique to Uganda. Throughout the world, one can find an estimated 25 million internally displaced persons, many without adequate food, medical care, shelter, education or security. Many are in camps for lengthy periods of time, in the case of Uganda more than 10 years. In most IDP situations, governments do not have the will or capacity to protect or assist their displaced populations.

The Ugandan humanitarian situation nonetheless has distinctive features. The IDP camps in Uganda have generally been described as among the worst in the world with unusually high mortality rates (1000 deaths per week) and high HIV AIDS rates. Francis Deng, the former Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, on visiting Uganda in 2003, described the situation as "clearly one of the gravest humanitarian crises in the world today." Jan Egeland, former UN Under Secretary-

General for Humanitarian Affairs, said in 2006, “In few other places on Earth, has so much suffering been inflicted on a civilian population.” Another distinguishing feature has been the horrific protection problems facing young people, as exemplified by the night commuters. In 2005, tens of thousands of young people had to walk each night to safer areas in order to sleep without being abducted, robbed, mutilated or raped by the Lord’s Resistance Army. Although international publicity gave some attention to the night commuters, they received minimal protection from their own government or from the international community. Today, the re-integration of those who became child combatants and sex slaves, or child mothers as the UN calls them, remains one of the more daunting challenges for the relief and development communities. Still another distinguishing feature is the huge number of IDPs in the country. Until recently, Uganda had the third highest IDP population in the world; it’s now the fourth, after Sudan, Colombia and Iraq. Even with recent IDP returns as a result of the peace process, IDPs still number over 1.3 million; last year it was 1.7 million or 6 percent of the population. Of the 20 countries in Africa with displaced populations, Uganda has the second highest number. Africa, it should be noted, has more than half of the world’s IDPs – about 12 million, being the continent most severely affected by civil war, human rights abuse, and poor governance.

Despite the life threatening needs of displaced populations in many parts of the world, it was not until the last decade of the twentieth century that the international community began to focus on people uprooted within their own countries. It was largely out of deference to sovereignty that the international community prior to 1990 focused almost exclusively on refugees – people who fled across borders. However, as IDP numbers began to exceed those of refugees in emergencies, and access to IDPs became easier at the end of the cold war, international efforts began to focus on assisting and protecting people *within* their own countries.

But helping IDPs in internal conflict situations has often proved daunting. For example, in Uganda, UN agencies in 2005 could access only 18 of 200 IDP camps without military escorts. These difficulties notwithstanding, international action in the case of Uganda was slow in coming. In fact, Jan Egeland called Uganda “the most forgotten humanitarian crisis in the world” and together with Francis Deng publicly pressed UN agencies to become more involved, especially in the protection area, and sought greater donor support. Despite the high number of children at risk, there were only a few UNICEF protection officers on the ground and little or no involvement by UNHCR. That later changed, but why the international community needed so much prodding in the case of Uganda could benefit from some good analysis. The absence of strong international institutional arrangements for IDPs – the UN only introduced its new cluster approach in 2006 – no doubt contributed. Western political support for the Museveni government (donors supply about half of the budget) seemed to go hand in hand with ignoring the humanitarian crisis in the north -- an area of the country that did not support Museveni’s coming to power. The Security Council did not issue a specific statement on the conflict in Uganda until 2006.

At the same time, primary responsibility for the security and well being of Uganda's internally displaced persons rests not with the international community but with the Ugandan government. As the book *Kop Ango* points out, international efforts can reinforce but not substitute for national action. But what does national responsibility entail? The Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement developed a framework for national responsibility in situations of internal displacement in order to assist governments in carrying out their national responsibility. For example, governments are expected to develop national policies on IDPs; create institutional mechanisms to implement these policies; and allocate adequate resources to ensure their success. In the case of Uganda, the UN urged its government to develop a national policy based on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the first international standards for IDPs.

In 2005, Uganda became one of the first countries to adopt a policy on IDPs. Its policy is one of the most comprehensive in the world, addressing protection against displacement, during displacement and during return and reintegration. The problem with the policy is that the government has failed to fully implement it. In 2006, as a result, the Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Walter Kalin, together with the Brookings-Bern Project, convened a workshop in Kampala, which the Ugandan government agreed to host. The meeting brought together national and local government officials from north and south, military and police, representatives of IDP communities, NGOs, UN agencies and the donor community. The workshop identified the main obstacles to carrying out the policy and made a series of recommendations. It called upon the government to widely disseminate the policy among government officials and affected populations; to educate and train local and national government officials in its provisions; to improve the flow of resources from central to local government so as to enable local authorities to carry out the policy; to consult actively with IDPs in developing solutions for their problems; to deploy well trained civilian police, including women police, around the camps (rather than military forces which were often responsible for human rights violations); and to facilitate IDP returns -- by removing landmines, increasing police presence in return areas, building infrastructure, making social services available, and establishing judicial mechanisms for criminal offenses and for land and property disputes.

Partly in response to international pressure, the government did earmark for the first time a small amount of funds in its 2007 budget -- some \$10 million -- to implement the national IDP policy. The government also adopted an emergency humanitarian plan, set up a joint monitoring committee with donors and the UN to coordinate humanitarian aid, and put together a peace, recovery and development plan for the north with a budget, that would need to be raised, of more than \$300 million. It also deployed more police presence in the north to increase protection.

In 2006, I had the opportunity to meet in Washington with Ugandan government officials, members of the opposition and civil society representatives. Members of the group called for more resources to implement the national IDP policy and the development plan. They also identified some of the main issues for effective returns -- accelerated land mine clearance, the building of permanent housing, the provision of

seeds and tools to IDPs for farming, and most importantly, land redistribution. Although more than 90 percent of the population in the north had been displaced, effective mechanisms to determine land ownership and deal with land disputes were not in place. The land tribunals set up met only twice a month, they said, and were overrun with backlogs of thousands of cases. Some feared that IDPs would begin to take the law into their own hands, generating more conflict.

To date, more than 500,000 IDPs have returned to their home areas, making it essential that conditions be put in place to make returns sustainable. Yet in the return areas, IDPs report *not* receiving the tools and building materials promised by the government. The bulk of the IDPs, however, remain in the camps (or in smaller settlements called decongestion sites) because the peace process is still tenuous. IDPs in the camps continue to need expanded educational facilities (more than half of camp populations are under the age of 15 with little schooling), expanded health facilities, greater access to land, and income generating activities to enable them to make the transition from dependency to recovery and development. Relief aid by itself is not sufficient. IDPs need both humanitarian and development-oriented programs. They also need effective protection from attack. Although security conditions in the north have improved substantially since the August 2006 cease-fire, there are still some LRA rebels as well as Karamoja cattle rustlers and undisciplined Ugandan military forces. But donor funds have not been plentiful. The World Food Program, for example, just cut food rations to more than one million IDPs because of a shortage of contributions.

Let me emphasize that the need to help IDPs is not only a major humanitarian and development challenge but also a political and strategic one central to the future cohesiveness and stability of the country. One cannot expect stability in Uganda if some parts of the country are economically moving forward while other parts are left behind. Ending the marginalization of the north, with the help of the international community, should be an important goal for Uganda's government. The UN Security Council has called upon the international community and the government to improve living conditions in the north where the IDPs are located. International support will also be needed politically to bolster the Secretary-General's special envoy in moving the peace process forward. It is my hope that today's meeting leads to greater advocacy on behalf of Uganda's displaced populations with the United States government and the international community.